Scotland: Global Cinema

A resident of Scotland since 1996, I first began to research Scottish Cinema in 2000, whilst writing my PhD at the University of Glasgow. Scotland: Global Cinema is the culmination of several years of work, including archival research trips funded by the British Academy and the Carnegie Trust. However, this is not solely a book about Scottish film production, but the output of contemporary filmmaking in Scotland (including Hollywood, Bollywood, English and French productions), and uses this particular, micro-scale small nation as a case study to help us better understand the much-used contemporary term, "Global Cinema."

A vibrant, if understudied, small national cinema, since the amazing breakthrough of Trainspotting (1996), the sudden emergence of New Scottish Cinema has now claimed the international spotlight in Scotland's direction. Numerous award-winning films have followed, including Lynne Ramsay's Ratcatcher (1993), Peter Mullan's The Magdalene Sisters (2002) and Andrew Arnold's Dogme 95 style Red Road (2006). Accordingly, research into the emergence of Scottish cinema is growing more rapidly now than has been the case since the first publications on the subject in the 1970s and 1980s. In such a context it struck me that the existing debates, which focused on the politics of representing Scotland cinematically, very often in relation to art films, did not always do justice to the wide range of films made in and about Scotland, or for that matter, what these films might mean to different audiences around the world.

Although over twenty Bollywood films have been shot in Scotland, no one had previously researched the manner in which they represented the country for Non-Resident Indian audiences. Again, although there is a long history of Loch Ness Monster movies (going back to the years of the first reported sightings of Nessie in the 1930s), there was no existing literature on these films, their link to tourism, and what audiences globally. Accordingly, I set out to explore ten different genres or modes of film production prevalent in the 1990s/2000s: the comedy, road movie, Bollywood extravaganza, (Loch Ness) monster movie, horror film, costume drama, gangster flick, social realist melodrama, female friendship/US indie movie, and art cinema. The diverse films discussed include the popular Indian film Kuch Kuch Hota Hai (1998), the huge budget US/UK coproductions like The Water Horse (2007), the French action film Danny the Dog [aka Unleashed] (2005) which starred Jet Li and Morgan Freeman, the English horror film Dog Soldiers (2002) as well as such varied Scottish-based productions as Ae Fond Kiss (2004), Festival (2005) and Red Road.

In this vibrant mixture of films I uncovered a host of previously unexplored histories of cinema in Scotland, and indeed, the many different identities, or Scotlands (national, transnational, diasporic, global/local, gendered, sexual, religious) that they construct cinematically. These myriad different "fantasy Scotlands" demonstrate the global position of Scotland, a small nation in an international context of transnational flows of film and tourism, and the wider fantasy (all typically of globalization), which meet and mingle against its own famous cinematic landscapes.

Dr David Martin-Jones
Senior Lecturer in Film Studies

"Goodbye Cinema, Hello Cinephilia": Jonathan Rosenbaum At St Andrews

This fall, we were proud to host Jonathan Rosenbaum (pictured here with Professor Dina Iordanova) to teach our MLitt students and deliver a presentation based on his article "Goodbye Cinema, Hello Cinephilia." The definition of "cinema," Rosenbaum argues, relies on "where" we are both literally and figuratively, therefore making a convincing case that the current trend of cinema reveals much about the current trends of us. Cinema as a mode of experiencing film is becoming an archaic practice as the result of the many challenges facing film as a business and artform. The age of DVDs and the internet has diminished the role of traditional cinema and has elevated the cinephile as its driving force. As a result, Rosenbaum suggests that cinephilia can be seen as something of an anarchist movement. For example, one model for the future he proposed was, just like with a music show, DVDs could be sold in the cinema lobby after a screening. As film scholars, this conclusion leaves us with many questions relating to our field, such as: Has cinephilia as the new model for film displaced the role of the traditional film critic and the art-film as we know it?

The striking feature of Mr. Rosenbaum's visit was that the style of his presentation and seminars mirrored the nature of his topic: improvised discussions that relied heavily on feedback and reception to a wide array of ideas. A contributing factor in the discussion was his lengthy career and personal experience as both a film critic and a cinephile, from which he drew upon to further illustrate his ideas on current film trends (i.e., visits to film festivals, and correspondence with cinephiles from around the globe). To contextualize the discussion, Rosenbaum pointed out that the issue of cinephilia served as a reminder of what he considers to be a major problem in Western society (the United States in particular): a lack of genuine public discourse.


John Traffon
PhD Student
Cinema Salon
Thoughtful film criticism

cinemasalon.ning.com/, an online forum for the discussion of new and recent films.

There are some 60 entries already on the site from a handful of different contributors, with Leslie Torchin and myself seemingly the main participants so far. Since Cinema Salon is an open site, anyone is welcome to add their own thoughts!

The posts take in some 85+ films, all of which have come to cinemas in and around Europe during the past year or so, with more posts being added all the time (though the busy nature of academic life means that the intensity of postings waxes and wanes). For example, the site includes some lofty explorations of the function and meaning of kids’ films such as Beverly Hills Chihuahua (2008) alongside detailed analyses of polemical documentaries such as The Other Europe (2006).

Furthermore, Cinema Salon enjoys over 140 members now, some of whom are familiar names to those working in Film Studies (though I shall not name them here; check out the site if you want to know more).

The site has had relatively calm traffic so far: over 650 people have looked at the site, with nearly 1,800 page views from browsers in 10 different countries from Europe, North America and Asia. That said, these statistics can only grow as something of a Film Studies community develops.

The idea of the site, at least as I conceive it, is to jot down and form complete thoughts on recently released films, although users can of course add any sort of postings that they wish—which is why I do not explicitly articulate this as policy anywhere. To this end, the site can serve as a first port of call for those wishing to find academic considerations of recent cinema; not just reviews, but how the films function, how we might interpret them, and so on.

Please do become a member if you are interested—and start commenting and writing your own blog on the site!

http://cinemasalon.ning.com/

Dr. William Brown
Lecturer in Film Studies

Cinema, Identities, and Beyond

Cinemas, Identities and Beyond was published in Fall 2009. It contributes to one of the most thought-provoking contemporary debates on cinemas and identities in Film Studies. This collection gathers essays that explore different dimensions of identities in frames of reference ranging from domestic spheres, urban micrus, socio-political environments, diasporic filmmaking issues, anthropology, film festivals, psychoanalysis, and the examination of stardom in society. The anthology establishes a framework that actively queries stabilized, ideological paradigms by examining different modes of representing and constructing identities in and through the medium of film. In doing so, it narrows the narrow confines of the local / national / regional, and challenges spatial and temporal boundaries.

Edited by two Film Studies PhD graduates, Ruby Cheung and D. H. Fleming, Cinemas, Identities and Beyond includes essays by Soo Jong Ahn, Mary Annale, Stefano Baschiera, William Brown, Christina Bruus, Sarah Gilligan, Lynne Hennes, Olga Kourelou, Lars Kristensen, Hui Miao, Jack Newsinger, Gracia Ramirez, Miriam Ross, and the two editors. Many of the essays represent the most advanced research in the field. Others revisit films such as Farewell My Concubine, The Matrix trilogy, The Straight Story, El Topo, and Days of Being Wild in order to discover new discourses to help better understand ourselves and our surroundings with another decade of the new millennium about to begin.

The concept of Cinemas, Identities and Beyond first came into being in 2006. Awarded with an AHRC funding for a postgraduate conference Cinemas, Identities and Beyond, which was held at the University of St. Andrews in November 2006, my co-organiser D. H. Fleming and I believed that a wide spectrum of texts, contexts and approaches would allow us to discuss cinemas and identities from various angles in a global cinematic environment. The need for an anthology to fulfill our goals was thus highlighted. It was hoped that by not confining our discussions within any particular geography or time period, we would gain insights into some of the most complex issues and forces affecting the construction and projection of 'identities' within World Cinema.

Cinemas, Identities and Beyond will prove to be of value to a broad range of scholars, critics and students who are interested in issues pertaining to identities, and their construction in and beyond film.

Dr. Ruby Cheung
The Leverhulme Trust Research Associate
Dynamics of World Cinema
Centre for Film Studies
Within The Frame: Scottish Consortium for Film and Visual Studies, University of Aberdeen 2009

The yearly SCFVS (Scottish Consortium for Film and Visual Studies) Symposium was held in May at King’s College, University of Aberdeen. The event was organised and run by Alan Marcus, Head of Film and Visual Culture, together with staff and students. The SCFVS Symposium was an opportunity for film and media scholars across national institutions to meet up, exchange ideas, tap into new developments, and set agendas for future progress. Six workshops, led by members of the consortium, were delivered through discussions about practices in teaching film and media. Topics ranged from ‘The Status of the Discipline’ and ‘Practice-based PhDs’ to ‘Issues of World Cinema’ and ‘Archival Research’. In the workshop that I attended on world cinema, the discussion dealt with what films are shown on the curriculum at various programmes and the implications of an imbalance toward Western films. However, as was highlighted by Christine Geraghty (University of Glasgow), most film theory read on the various courses are Eurocentric, which illustrates how deeply our understanding of cinema is framed within Western thought.

While revealing old hierarchies within the different institutional approaches, the workshop gave food for thought to all practitioners of course development. In addition, we were treated to three keynote speakers, who, in their own way, illustrated the diversity of modern scholarship in Film and Visual Studies. Elizabeth Cowie (University of Kent) gave a talk about time and the non-fiction film, stating that film, like prosthetic technology, helps construct causality between past and present. Cowie presented examples from War Neuroses (1917), which featured soldiers suffering from war trauma, illustrating how past events (battle) influence the present (the film experience) and how re-enactment helps uncover (gap-closing) the dispersed time frames. Duncan Petrie (University of York) delivered recent research into education in filmmaking, showing the interface between theoretical and hands-on approaches. By highlighting the format of different film schools, Petrie reminded us that filmmakers have been intrinsic in the development of teaching film, training filmmakers and writing film theory. Drawing historical lines to the building of national film schools in Europe and the influence of the movie-brats in the US, the paper seemed poignant in relation to UK institutional developments, balancing academic education and vocational training. The host institution is a good example of this development, which was illustrated by the last speaker, surrealist director Raul Ruiz (University of Aberdeen). Ruiz has made over 100 films and is still an active filmmaker. But he is also Professor of Film and Modern Thought at Aberdeen, teaching filmmaking to students from whose work he showed clips. Ruiz embodies the practitioner, theorist and educator, and SCFVS should be proud to have such a figure among its ranks.

Dr. Lars Kristensen
PhD Graduate

Africa in Motion Film Festival

Africa in Motion is the UK’s largest African film festival. Based in Edinburgh, over 50 films are screened each season with several of these titles travelling to other independent festivals affiliated with the main Edinburgh festival. This November, St Andrews hosted selected titles for the first time. Led by a team of three undergraduate Film Studies students and one Social Anthropology student, the festival sought to raise awareness of African cinema, not only across the disciplines of the university but also in the town of St Andrews itself.

The festival screened three films: Johnny Mad Dog (Liberia, 2008), La Maison Jaune (Zimbabwe, 1996), and Flame (Algeria/France, 2007). To complement the UN International Year of Reconciliation, the films focused on different methods of reconciliation in the face of varied histories and contexts. Lizzie Bischoff and Stefanie Van De Peer, co-directors of Africa in Motion, introduced two of the films. The festival committee was forced to make a program shift, as one of the films originally selected for the festival was of a format that the local cinema was not equipped to screen. While this was a minor setback, it taught the committee about different formats and ultimately drew in a larger crowd, as the replacement film ended up being the most popular of the festival.

Africa in Motion received press help on many fronts to promote the event. The University’s student-run radio station, STAR FM, interviewed the festival organizers, asking questions about the festival, the film selection process, and their hopes in bringing the festival to St Andrews (this podcast is available online). The student-run newspaper, The Saint, also ran an article written by a member of the committee that further raised student awareness of the venture. The St Andrews University Press Office was also helpful, as local newspapers (assisting with drawing members from the local community to the festival) picked up a release prepared by this office. Multiple online venues were also used in the promotion of the event; the Film Studies webpage and social networking sites (such as Facebook) were among those used.

The Africa in Motion St Andrews film festival ultimately accomplished what it set out to do. Drawing a substantial crowd of anthropologists and geographers, there were many non-film students and staff in attendance, which fostered prospects for future cross-disciplinary collaborations. There was also a sizeable number of members from the local community in the audience, expanding the exposure of African cinema and generating an awareness of its diversity. These positive results paves the way for further ventures of this kind and will hopefully increase appreciation of African cinema.

Helen Amiri
Film Studies Undergraduate student
Conference Round-Up: Summer 2009

It was a pleasure to attend several outstanding conferences last summer, including:

- "The New Extremism: Contemporary European Cinema," held at Anglia Ruskin in Cambridge on 24-25 April 2009
- The Society for Cognitive Studies of the Moving Image (SCSMI) Conference, held at the University of Copenhagen on 24-27 June 2009

Each conference was bristling with fresh work from an array of talented international scholars, and each provided a fantastic opportunity to meet new people working on film in a variety of ways.

At the New Extremism, I presented a paper on the concept of 'monstrosity' in cinema. In my discussion, I drew upon scholars as diverse as André Gaudreault and Jean-Luc Nancy to put forward a theoretical argument that cinema shows before it tells. That is, cinema is 'monstrous' before it becomes narrative, and this is made most clear in films belonging to the 'New Extremity' in Europe, wherein the explicit nature of sex and/or violence is initially incomprehensible and requires the viewer to 'make sense' of what is seen.

The keynote address at the conference was by Professor Martine Buagnit, from the University of Edinburgh, who spoke about a diverse range of French films in her consideration of 'The Wounded Screen: French Cinema in the Liminal Zone,' a paper that seemed to stem from her excellent monograph, Cinema and Sensation: French Cinema and the Art of Transgression (EUP, 2007).

The second keynote talk was delivered by Professor Martin Barker, who spoke about 'Watching Rape, Enjoying Watching Rape: What Do Audiences Do,' a challenging consideration of audience response to extreme, onscreen sexual violence, which formed part of a large BBFC-funded project recently carried out by Barker at the University of Aberystwyth. Additionally, the conference included a timely book launch for Catherine Wheatley's monograph on Michael Haneke, Michael Haneke's Cinema: The Ethic of the Image (Berghahn, 2009).

With regard to attending my first SCSMI Conference, I must say that I was somewhat nervous before heading to Copenhagen. The list of professors talking at the event, together with other distinguished scholars who have specialised for much longer than I have in cognitive approaches to cinema, made for a daunting experience. This was not just Film Studies. I'd be presenting work to people who would spot my philosophical shortcomings a mile off. However, SCSMI was nothing if not friendly in its academic rigour, and this, together with the format of giving 30 minutes to speak and then 20 minutes to answer questions for each speaker meant that everyone could really come to grips with and defend their subject matter.

I saw papers on an array of topics, from cinematography to what happens to our eyes when we watch films to our ability to conduct therapy through cinema, each seemingly more exciting than the last. I myself presented on reasons why cinema, in the contemporary age, might have become what David Bordwell defines as a cinema of 'intensified continuity,' using psychological and physiological research to explain why our attention is pleasurably attracted to a screen where we see an immense amount of cutting and fast-moving images. In other words, I wanted to argue that there might be a 'natural' reason to enjoy fast-moving films (they appeal to our survival instincts to detect prey, predator or mates). There is still, perhaps, even an urgent need for the ideological critique of films of 'intensified continuity' - films that otherwise move too fast for us to engage with them in a critical fashion.

The keynote address was given by David Bordwell, who spoke about 'Seeing, More or Less: Some Problems for Cognitive Theory of Film,' while the conference also included a screening of Lars von Trier's latest film, Antichrist (2009) at the Danish Film Institute. Von Trier himself gracured the event with his presence and, uncomfortably at first, fielded questions from the assembled academics, before admitting to liking the film once he found himself surrounded by friendly cinephiles as opposed to potentially critical journalists – an act of friendliness and good faith that characterised the conference as a whole.

Finally, at the University of Bristol, I presented a paper on neurocience and colour in cinema, arguing that colour is, as far as our cerebral response to cinema is concerned, something that the brain processes before movement. Colour is as much as, if not more than movement, the stuff of cinema. This I then sought to demonstrate in the 'natural' pleasures offered by the digital colour manipulation of O Brother, Where Art Thou? (2000).

It was unfortunate that I had a surgery eye problem in the middle day of this three-day conference, meaning that I missed a raft of papers that otherwise I would have wished to see, including an impromptu keynote talk on a similar topic from Ian Christie (replacing Laura Mulvey at the last minute). However, I did manage to catch Tom Gunning talk about 'Are Black & White: the Colours of Cinema? Light, colour, and the rhetoric of cinematic invisibility,' and Al Rees' paper about 'Colour Shifts in Experimental Cinema,' which included an opportunity to see films by Len Lye, Peter Kubelka and James and John Whitney.

Sarah Barrow, Tanya Horrock and Tina Kendall (New Extremism) should be commended for organising an excellent two days that were blessed by some fantastic Cantabrian weather. Thanks should go to Sarah Street, Liz Watkins, Simon Brown, Vicky Jackson and Deborah Gibbs (Bristol) for organising a splendid conference that took place in the delightful setting of the Arnolfini Centre, right in the heart of Bristol's quay area. Thanks also to Johannes Ris (SCSMI) and his team for putting on a fantastic event (that also included an abundance of free food on the banks of the Christianshavns canal).

All in all, a fantastic summer's set of conferences. And if I can go to a better trio again, I shall be a very happy conference participant indeed!

Dr. William Brown
Lecturer In Film Studies
Deleuze in Taiwan: A Talk at National Chung Hsing University, Taichung, Taiwan

In March 2009 I was extremely honoured to be invited to give a talk at the Life and Ethics Reading Group hosted at the Research Centre for the Humanities and Social Sciences at National Chung Hsing University in Taichung, Taiwan. National Chung Hsing University is among five universities who have been funded by the Ministry of Education to create an interdisciplinary Research Centre which integrates dynamic research in Anglophone and Taiwanese literature, language studies, philosophy and sociology. They are holding the reading group twice per month to discuss theorists such as Gilles Deleuze, Alain Badiou and Slavoj Žižek. The group involves scholars affiliated with institutions in different corners of Taiwan for inspiring productive discussions under a convivial atmosphere. Members include Prof. Chiu Kueifen, the director of the Research Centre and also an honorary fellow at Lingnan University in Hong Kong, Professors Liao Chao Yang from the Department of Foreign Languages and Literatures at National Taiwan University; Dr. Li Yulin, Dr. Li Hung-Chiung, Dr. Jasmine Lin, Dr. Chen Chun-Yen, Dr. Huang Hsin-Yu and Dr. Yang Nai-Nu, plus many other scholars and postgraduate students.

At the beginning of the seminar, I gave a talk on the in-between space in Michael Haneke’s Code Unknown (2000). I began with a short introduction of Haneke, his films and his transnational status. I then showed a clip of the opening tracking shot and argued that the film’s characters contain an in-between status, not only in-between snapshots but also in-between frames. Living in a structure, stratified space, their bodies, framed and reframed in any-spaces-whatever, are unable to react. During the discussion, I contextualised my use of Deleuze in film studies, putting the medium of film at the core of research while exploiting the relationship between film and aesthetic in technological and cultural contexts. Many of the scholars present were very interested in these concepts of in-betweenness and the virtual and there ensued a lively debate about the relationship between becoming and in-betweenness. Overall the discussion was an interesting translingual experience. We code-mixed and code-switched between English and Mandarin Chinese to express a more collective understanding of Deleuze. Also, rewarding was the perspective given by scholars specialising in Taiwanese literature and culture. They embraced Deleuze with great enthusiasm but were also very mindful of the limitations of Eurocentrism in his work.

I am especially grateful to Professor Chiu Kueifen and Dr. Li Yulin (I met later Dr. Li Yulin and Dr. Jasmin Lin, that summer at a Deleuze conference in Cologne) for organising the event. It has been a truly wonderful opportunity to meet some of the key scholars in Taiwan.

Yun-hua Chen
PhD Student

Deleuze Studies Ate My Supervisor
The Second Annual Deleuze Studies Conference, University of Cologne, August 2009

This year it was an absolute delight to attend the second annual Deleuze Studies conference in Cologne. I participated along with three of my doctoral students, David H. Fleming, Serafei Peykerman, and Yun-hua Chen. This trip was a fitting reward for us all, as it marked the culmination of several years of effort within the Department of Film Studies at St Andrews in the development of a range of projects that focus on Deleuze and various cinemas from around the world. This theoretical position at St Andrews is about to be strengthened by the arrival of further PhD students working on Deleuze and cinema, a topic of great interest to myself as well as other colleagues such as Dr William Brown and Professor Robert Burgoyne.

Deleuze Studies is an absolutely thriving field, drawing in hundreds of scholars working in various disciplines around the world, with Edinburgh University Press and Continuum providing the major publishing outlets. The journal’s founder, Professor lan Buchanan (University of Cardiff, UK) — who will give a paper as part of the St Andrews Centre for Film Studies Seminar Series this Fall — is to be praised for identifying the potential Deleuze Studies has to provide a major cross-disciplinary approach to the study of just about anything related to contemporary culture and thought.

The presence of Film Studies was particularly strong, with five panels dedicated to Deleuze and Film covering a range of topics from Hitchcock to my own paper on contemporary South American art films about recent histories of military rule. The conference was closed by a keynote paper by Professor Patricia Potter on the interaction between Deleuze, cinema and neuroscience. I was personally gratified to find that, in contrast to certain occasions in the past when I had discussed cinema as a means of criticizing certain aspects of Deleuze’s work, my own work was greeted with convivial acceptance. Things seem to bode well for Deleuze and World Cinemas, my forthcoming monograph with Continuum (2011).

One of the major advantages of the international dimension of the conference was the opportunity to catch up with old friends — in particular with friends from my time teaching postgraduates at the University of Campinas, Brazil in 2007 — and to make contact for the first time with scholars with shared interests from locations like Taiwan. Deleuze Studies, it seems, is a truly global phenomenon, as is the take-up of Deleuze for the study of cinemas from around the world. For me personally, however, the highlight, along with standout papers by Robin Durie and Daniel W. Smith, was my first encounter with the amazing work of Deleuze-inspired Korean artist, Jung-Yeon Min. See you next year in Amsterdam!

David Martin-Jones
Senior Lecturer in Film Studies
Do Films Philosophise?
What is Film-Philosophy? Round Table Discussion

On October 12th in a small room tucked away inside the St Andrews Arts building a discussion was taking place which sought to identify the role philosophy plays in understanding the medium of film. Several key questions were raised: what is film philosophy? How does philosophy help in the interpretation of film texts? And can film itself transform and aid an understanding of philosophy? Dealing with these concerns were Dr. David Martin-Jones and Dr. William Brown of the St Andrews Film Studies department, Professor Berys Gaut from the department of Philosophy, Dr. John Mullarkey of the University of Dundee and Dr. Robert Sinnerbrink, who was kind enough to travel from Macquarie University in Sydney.

Via a series of short papers and a round table discussion, the five participants engaged in a lively debate about the ‘sudden interest’ in film philosophy that has taken place (and vice-versa) since the late 1980s. This has raised questions of whether or not film can ‘philosophise’ and how the filmmaker and film theorist might share the same pedagogical world as the philosopher. Do they share the same reality? Berys Gaut pointed out that the idea of film reality is increasingly complicated by the onset of digital cinema and its alteration of the cinematic image. As a result, notions of film realism are constantly shifting according to technological innovations. The work of the film theorist and film philosopher must invariably accommodate these developments and this suggests a shared future.

The one point emphasised by all five contributors was philosophy’s supposed ‘encroachment’ onto film studies through the guise of film theory. The notion of film theory has often been treated with a certain degree of suspicion in recent years and several of the speakers considered whether film studies has a reductive effect on both the study of cinema and cinema itself. By applying philosophical and theoretical frameworks to the medium, do we run the risk of turning a very human art-form into an almost scientific venture and therefore rob cinema of its purity? With this ‘purity’ blunted, it may be the case that the focus becomes less about film analysis and film’s relationship with the audience and more about theories of it. Tellingly, and perhaps knowingly, few actual films were mentioned during the talk (with the exception of Christopher Nolan’s Memento (2000)).

It was also noted that philosophy has been accused of co-opting the study of film for its own ends, as if it were an aging vampire rejuvenating itself at the expense of a younger discipline. However, it was suggested that an enduring and mutually beneficial interdisciplinary relationship can be forged between the two areas and that film and film theory can indeed philosophise, just as philosophical meditations on film appear to be flourishing. The question of whether cinema can aid philosophical understandings may be asking the wrong question. As is evident in Deleuzian and Foucauldian studies of film, a broad application to philosophy can aid film scholars and students towards a better understanding of the medium they are studying.

Thank you to David, Will, Berys, John and Robert and to all those in attendance.

Andrew Dorman
PhD Student

Professor Ian Buchanan: Jindabyne and the political unconscious of ‘white’ Australia

Ian Buchanan’s November 17th talk on “Jindabyne and the political unconscious of ‘white’ Australia” could not have been timelier. On the previous day, the Australian government issued an apology to the ‘Home Children’ – child migrants sent from Britain to Australia in the mid 20th century – the second time within two years that the Australian government has publicly acknowledged past-wrongdoings against its own population. Another incident was Prime Minister Kevin Rudd’s national apology to Australia’s indigenous population in 2008, thirteen years after an apology was suggested by the Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission. These incidents, as Professor Buchanan points out, demonstrate a pattern of denial within the actions of the Australian government that is central to a discussion of Ray Lawrence’s 2006 film Jindabyne. In his talk, Professor Buchanan used Fredric Jameson’s concept of national allegory as a way to read Jindabyne’s examination of the political unconscious of white Australia.

The film tells the story of a group of friends who, while on a fishing trip, stumble upon the body of a murdered indigenous Australian girl. Though horrified by what they find, they chose to take no action. The reaction to the dead body, Buchanan argues, draws similarities to Judith Butler’s argument of when life becomes valuable; the body makes no ethical demands on those who find it because it is not something that matters to them and therefore there is no obligation to alter the crisis. This sentiment appears to mirror the Australia government’s reluctance to apologize for its actions against the indigenous population: why should we feel responsible for a crime that we ourselves did not commit? It is in this sentiment that a correlation can be drawn between the narrative of the film and the ambivalence that underscores the political unconscious of white Australia as observed by the West.

Ian Buchanan is a cultural theorist from Western Australia and currently teaches at Cardiff University. He is the founding editor of Deleuze Studies and the series editor of Deleuze Connections. Additionally, he has also published material on Michel de Certeau and Fredric Jameson. His works include Michel de Certeau: Cultural Theorist (2000), Fredric Jameson: Live Theory (2006), and Deleuze and Giattini’s Anti-Dedipus (2008).

John Traffon
PhD Student
Cinemas, Identities and Beyond
Edited by Ruby Cheung with D. H. Fleming
Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2009
Price: £39.99 (UK), $59.99 (US)
Cinemas, Identities and Beyond contributes to one of the most thought-provoking contemporary debates on cinemas and identities in film studies. It gathers fifteen essays that explore different dimensions of identities in contexts ranging from domestic spheres, urban milieux, sociopolitical environments, diasporic film-making issues, anthropology, film festivals, and psychoanalysis to the examination of stardom in society. The anthology establishes a framework that actively queries stabilised, ideological paradigms by examining different modes of representing and constructing identities in and through the medium of film. In doing so, it transcends the narrow confines of the local / national / regional, and challenges spatial and temporal boundaries.

Many of the essays represent the most advanced research in the field. Others revisit films such as The Matrix trilogy, The Straight Story, and Days of Being Wild in order to discover new discourses to help better understand ourselves and our surroundings when another decade of the new millennium is about to begin.

Film Festival Yearbook 2: Film Festivals and Imagined Communities
Edited by Dina Iordanova with Ruby Cheung
St Andrews Film Studies, 2010
ISBN: 978-0-9563730-1-4 (paperback)
Price: £17.99 (UK)
http://www.st-andrews.ac.uk/filmbooks

Film Festivals and Imagined Communities, the second volume in the Film Festival Yearbook series, brings together essays about festivals that use international cinema to mediate the creation of transnational ‘imagined communities’. There are texts about the cultural policies and funding models connected to these festivals, as well as analysis of programming practices linked to these often highly politicized events. The case studies discuss diaspora-linked festivals that take place in Vienna, San Francisco, San Sebastian, Havana, Bradford, Sahara, South Korea, and London and that feature cinema from places as diverse as Nepal and Kurdistan, Africa and Latin America. Authors include Lindiwe Dovey, Ruby Cheung, Michael Guíllem, Jéréme Segal, Miriam Ross, Roy Stafford, Yun-Mi Hwang, Isabel Santos-Mila, Stefan Simanowitz, Mustafa Güneş, and Dina Iordanova. The Resources section features an up-to-date bibliography on film festival scholarship (by Skadi Loist and Marijke de Valk) and an extensive thematically-organised listing of a variety of transnational festivals.

Cinema at the Periphery
Edited by Dina Iordanova, David Martin-Jones, and Belén Vidal
Wayne State University Press, 2010
ISBN: 978-0-8143-3388-4 (paperback)
Price: $29.95 (US)
http://wsupress.wayne.edu/books/968/Cinema-at-the-Periphery

From Iceland to Iran, from Singapore to Scotland, a growing intellectual and cultural wave of production is taking cinema beyond the borders of its place of origin: exploring faraway places, interacting with barely known peoples, and making new localities imaginable. Previously entrenched spatial divisions no longer function as firmly fixed grid coordinates, the hierarchical position of place as ‘centre’ is subverted, and new forms of representation become possible.

Cinema at the Periphery assembles critical writing by Faye Ginsburg, Mette Hjort, Sheldon Lu, Duncan Petrie, Kay Dickinson, Lucia Nagib, and Bill Marshall among others, all exploring issues of the periphery in terms of locations, practices, methods, and themes, including questions of transcultural space, place, passage, and migration. Focusing on case studies of small national cinemas located at the global margins but also of filmmaking that comes from peripheral cultures (like Palestinian 'stateless' cinema or Australian Aboriginal films) the volume highlights the inextricable interrelationship between production modes, circulation channels, and the emerging narratives of histories and identities they enable.
New Publications by University of St. Andrews Staff 2010

Film Nation: Hollywood Looks at U.S. History
Revised Edition
By Robert Burgoyne
University of Minnesota Press, 2010
Price: $22.50 (paper), $67.50 (cloth) (US)
http://www.upress.umn.edu/Books/B/burgoyne_film.html

Events of the last decade have dramatically rewritten the American national narrative, bringing to light an alternate history of nation, one marked from the country’s origins by competing geopolitical interests, by mobility and migration, and by contending ethnic and racial groups.

In the revised and expanded edition of Film Nation, Robert Burgoyne analyzes films that give shape to the counternarrative that has emerged since 9/11, one that challenges the traditional myths of the American nation-state. The films analyzed here, Burgoyne argues, reveal the hidden underlayers of nation, the conflicts of dramatically different peoples and competing concepts of collective destiny, from the first interaction between Europeans and Native Americans (The New World), to the clash of ethnic groups in nineteenth century New York during the city’s first great wave of immigration (Gangs of New York), to the haunting persistence of war in the national imagination (Flags of Our Fathers and Letters from Iwo Jima), and the impact of the events of 9/11 on American national identity (United 93 and World Trade Center).

Moving People, Moving Images: Cinema and Trafficking in the New Europe
By William Brown, Dina Iordanova, Lesiu Torchin
St Andrews Film Studies, 2010
Price: £17.99 (UK)
http://www.st-andrews.ac.uk/filmbooks

Human trafficking has long been a subject of cinema. The silent film Traffic in Souls used it to titillate and promote reform movements as early as 1913. Since then, the subject has been revisited at various times and in various contexts. During the past decade, the dramatic rise in migration and the demise of national borders across the ‘new’ Europe have turned human traffic into one of the dominant narratives of contemporary cinema. This study focuses on the current cycle of films that play upon global anxieties about trafficking. Like their subject, the essays in this volume cross national borders to reflect on recent films that depict white slavery, drug trafficking and undocumented labour. The volume considers trafficking films by internationally renowned directors such as Amos Gitai (Promised Land), the Dardenne Brothers (Lorna’s Silence), Nick Broomfield (Ghosts), Michael Winterbottom (In This World), and Ulrich Seidl (Import/Export). A range of documentary and activist films are also examined, as well as examples from the realm of popular genres, such as Taken (Pierre Morel, 2008).
Film and Politics

‘Impact’ is the controversial criterion of the upcoming research assessment. Defined as ‘demonstrable benefits to wider economy and society’, the demand for impact has generated many concerns within the field of Arts and Humanities, particularly given the covert emphasis on economic, or industrial benefits (never mind the challenges of quantification). However, as my research concerns the ways in which film and video are used in social advocacy movements, I am convinced that Film Studies is a vital force in understanding and changing the world around us.

A few recent events bolster my conviction of Film Studies’ value to society. Last spring, I attended a discussion and screening held in the Scottish Parliament, entitled ‘Towards a Culture of Human Rights in Scotland’. There was a screening of sections from the New Ten Commandments, a ten-part documentary featuring the work of Scottish talent including Nick Higgins, Tilda Swinton, Irvine Welsh and Kenny Glennan, all of whom look at human rights through a Scottish lens. Made in honour of the 60th anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the film reminds us all that human rights violations are not simply a problem for people ‘over there’ but for us here as well. The session united activists and filmmakers in productive discussion. I have invited Nick Higgins to screen the film in St Andrews next semester so that we may all continue this conversation.

In September, I was invited to participate in a roundtable at the full-day workshop, Terrorism from a Multidisciplinary Perspective, hosted by The Centre for the Study of Terrorism and Political Violence at the University of St Andrews. Contributing a Film Studies perspective to the study of terrorism, I moved beyond questions of representation in order to outline additional approaches, specifically with regard to exploration of film and video use. Although representation of terrorists and their victims is a significant topic for study, one must not forget other questions, such as how film and video have been used to contribute to the spectacle of terrorism, or how film and video have been used to radicalise and politicise young men and women. So many people in this field refer to the value of media in these projects, but few look at the formal qualities of the text, or at the practices of production, circulation, and exhibition that influence effect. What was possibly most shocking, I realised, is that counter-terrorism programmes seek to intervene in radicalisation projects, whereas my work, in general, focuses on ways film and video are used to transform passive audiences into political publics, ready to act on behalf of distant suffering. This ‘contradiction’, if anything, points to the value of Film Studies for International Relations and broader political discussions.

To this end, I feel emboldened by my continued research into the field of film and human rights, most recently reflected in my paper given at the University of Glasgow’s Centre for Screen Studies (1 October, 2009). Entitled, ‘Envisioning Economic Human Rights’, it examines the attempts to create a cinematic discourse of economic human rights, a field of rights rendered secondary courtesy of the legacy of Cold War politics. In this case, representation provides a central question: How can one represent economic human rights and their violations? These are often less spectacular than political and civil human rights violations, such as torture, and are often understood through a lens of charity—something that demands giving rather than implementation of policy. Films I consider include, but are hardly limited to, Life and Debt (Stephanie Black, 2001), Darwin’s Nightmare (Hubert Sauper, 2004), Black Gold (Marc and Nick Francis, 2006), Memoire d’un Saccage (Fernando Solanas, 2004). I look forward to developing this discussion in the future.

Leslie Torechin
Lecturer in Film Studies

Queer Cinema in St Andrews

Are representations of homosexuality becoming commonplace in mainstream cinema or do they still reside at the margins? Do even the most conventional ‘straight’ Hollywood films conceal queer subtexts? How does one define what is queer in heteronormative cultures and societies? These are just a few of the concerns we wish to address with the Queer Cinema Group due to begin in early February 2010.

Responding to a demand from students, Dr. Elisabetta Girilli has been running the group since early 2009 with fortnightly screenings accompanied by informal discussion sessions. This arrangement will continue next semester and is open to all university students and staff with an interest in queer cinema and queer identities. No prior knowledge is required, just a desire to know more about the ways in which filmmakers, both gay and straight, have depicted homosexuality since the dawn of cinema.

We aim to cover a wide variety of topics and films, both popular and obscure, from different eras and nations: from a seemingly ‘straight’ Hollywood western like Red River (Howard Hawks, 1948), to the underrated independent Paraking Glances (Bill Sherwood, 1986); from the controversial Cruising (William Friedkin, 1980) to Fremde Haut/Unveiled (Angelina Maccarone, 2005), a film in which a young Muslim woman goes to great lengths to avoid being persecuted because of her sexuality. Each screening will be followed by a discussion in the Film Studies Board Room that focuses on the major themes contained in the chosen film. A critical text or article will be suggested beforehand as preparatory reading. In doing this, we hope to present topics that include the ‘visibility’ of gay characters in Golden Age Hollywood, the homosexual villain, AIDS cinema, and queer identity in societies where being ‘queer’ remains a criminal offence.

In order to make this a successful and fulfilling experience, we hope to attract as many attendees as possible. Further information on screening dates, suggested topics and readings will be available in the new year.

Andrew Dorman
PhD Student
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Can one shoot a film for nothing? Can one shoot a half-decent film for nothing? Can one shoot a good film for nothing? These are the challenges that I set for myself in making *En Attendant Godard*.

Having now pitched films and scripts at producers for quite a few years with no promise of success (no films made, no pay cheque – yet), I figured that the only way to get a film done was to make it myself and not care about needing money, needing permissions, and so on.

Other reasons floating through my mind were: well, if you teach Film Studies, you need to find out first-hand what’s involved in filmmaking. I had done penance in production companies (boring) and worked on film sets (slightly less boring depending on what job they give you) and even made some short-ish films myself (much more fun), but never had I chased the white whale of a feature. And I am, in something of a naïve leftist kind of way, worried about ‘big issues’ like ‘capitalism’ and ‘the system.’ So I also wanted to make a film that made a point of its moneynesslessness, or, as I like to call it, its freedom.

From whom might I take inspiration for this film? Well, I’ve always loved Jean-Luc Godard’s cinema and, for a while, he was the filmaker of a generation charged with rebellious sentiment and political engagement (and now charged with irritating nostalgia about how rebellious and engaged they were). So he would be my main influence, although I thought that my film might also take Godard to task a little for giving up on political resistance, for finding death in everything: death of socialism, death of cinema, death of art, etc. I wanted to make a film with *life* (and, yes, I wanted to make a work of art, however pretentious that may sound).

Pulling in every favor I could muster for locations, and getting unemployed credit crunch friends to act and work as crew, I decided to make a film about a young man who claims to be the illegitimate son of Godard and who decides on a whim to go find him. And so, despite a last-minute scare that I was losing my eyesight (long story), we started filming in London on July 13th, 2009, before spending the next fortnight travelling to Dover, Calais, Paris, Geneva and Godard’s hometown of Rolle, on the shores of Lake Geneva.

**Filming without permissions is interesting. We were chucked out of various locations (the Trocadero in London, Charing Cross station, the Bibliothèque François Mitterrand, the Louvre – who subsequently allowed us back in) and were stopped by the police on several occasions, most memorably while hitching on the Autoroute des Anglais from Calais to Paris. But we were also left to our own devices in many other locations that we ‘stormed’ without permission: the BFI Southbank, the Cinémathèque Française, the Cadiens du Cinema and the Café des Deux Moulins, better known as the café featured in *Amélie*.**

However, on the whole, everyone we met was friendly and generous. We had a magnificent experience, the mood of which really began to feel like the mood of the film that I wanted to make: going around and offering a courteous fuck to my self for daring to think that I could not do these things without the weight of hard cash behind me. Now that filming and editing are over, phase one is complete. But phase two remains. And that is to see whether people like the film.

I’m not afraid that people will find it pretentious, and they will because it is pretentious (or what I call honest). I’ve not made and I’ve not wanted to make *Jurassic Park*. However, I am afraid of that death knell that says not so much don’t give up the day job (because I have a day job), but don’t set foot behind a camera again. Ever. I’ve seen four-year-olds direct better films than this. Well, I am probably protesting too much. I don’t think *En Attendant Godard* is that bad, otherwise I wouldn’t want to show it to people or write about it. But arrogance and uncertainty often come in equal measure. Hence the question: can one make a good film for nothing? We shall see.

And the selection committee for the Cannes Film Festival will have to see, too.

Dr. William Brown
Lecturer in Film Studies

Critic Jonathan Rosenbaum who saw *En Attendant Godard* at its St. Andrews premiere has listed it as one of the five best films of the year in Sight and Sound’s survey of the year’s best films.

**Congratulations**

And finally, congratulations to Dr. David Fleming and Dr. Lars Kristensen on the completion of their PhD research. Also, congratulations to Professor Dina Iordanova on becoming Provost of the University of St. Andrews and on her appointment as Distinguished Visiting Professor at Queen Mary University of London for the Spring of 2010.

We wish you all well in your future endeavours.

Editors: Andrew Dorman and John Trafton